

## **NOAA Employee Worklife Center Proposal to Expand Worklife Services to Field Employees**

The NOAA Employee Worklife Center Pilot Program Year End Report was presented during the NOAA Diversity Council meeting held June 14, 2002. The findings from the Report, which were discussed during the meeting, show that employees throughout NOAA value the services they receive from the Worklife Center. Feedback solicited from employees indicate that 71% of employees want the services to be continued in Headquarters and 70% feel that worklife services should be expanded to the Field.

Based on these findings, the Council unanimously decided to continue the services of Employee Worklife Center. Along with this decision, the Council decided to terminate the contract with Caliber, Fried, and Sher to manage the Center, and agreed that the Office of Diversity would staff the Center through the end of the current fiscal year. The Council also discussed ways to expand the worklife services to field employees.

Some of the suggestions mentioned during the discussion were to rotate worklife seminars between the Administrative Service Centers (ASCs); to display worklife posters to Field offices; to post worklife information on the unions' home pages; and to disseminate copies of the worklife video to field sites. Suggestions from the Report which were also referred to, included establishing relaxation rooms equipped with relaxation chairs in field locations with large numbers of NOAA employees; establishing lactation rooms; setting up kiosks in Field locations and supplying them with information similar to that located in the Worklife Center; identifying worklife coordinators in various field sites and increasing travel funds for site visits. Members of the Council requested that these and other options be explored. This involved obtaining additional input from Field employees on ways to expand worklife services to the Field and incorporating it into a proposal to be presented during the next meeting.

The NOAA SFA Facilitator cadre was asked to submit any ideas on how a better job could be done in delivering worklife services to Field and ship employees. The Facilitator cadre was solicited because many of them either work in the Field or have traveled to sites throughout NOAA. Many good ideas were received from facilitators located in places such as North Dakota, Chicago, North Carolina, Nebraska and Seattle.

The ideas ranged from providing more information on the Worklife Center web site to setting up agreements with fitness centers to increased supervisory and facility support, training and resource allocation (see Appendix). Some involve little or no cost while others involve significant costs. To establish an Employee Worklife Program that will truly benefit employees in Headquarters and the Field will require a commitment of additional funds and staffing. It is proposed that the Council consider one of the following contracting options to best address ways in which the Employee Worklife Center and its services can be expanded to include and service Field employees:

- (1) Contract out the management of the worklife center and in the requirements documentation, request that the contractors include in their responses, a description of how they will develop,

implement and manage a worklife center for both Headquarters and Field employees that best suits the needs of NOAA employees.

(2) Contract out the management of the Worklife Center and in the requirements documentation, request that a second full-time worklife advisor/consultant to be devoted exclusively to Field worklife services and sessions.

(3) Request that the ASC's set up Worklife Centers which will service employees located in their respective regions.

## **APPENDIX**

*"It would be really nice to occasionally have worklife speakers and special presentations set up in places like Seattle or other areas where there are large concentrations of NOAA employees. I'm sure the worklife staff could find local presenters so that costs would be minimized. It is discouraging to realize how many services are available only to Washington DC area employees. I once tried to listen in to a presentation that was supposed to be broadcast via the web site but it didn't work. So that would be a helpful option also. I would like to add that our local diversity coordinator has been organizing a number of special speakers for NOS employees here - we have had several presentations related to senior services and care of aging relatives, which is an issue for many of us. Other offices might want to follow this example."*

*"Some of these suggestions may be posted on other pages, but I think the WorkLife Center Web page could be a one-stop shopping place for this information. Also some of these may have been done in the past, but a refresher is good for everyone. (1) Post on the worklife page alternate work schedules. (All of the schedules that you can find.) This will help NWS field offices which the majority of people work shift work. In addition to this, post research on shift work and how it affects life span, sleep habit, health, etc... (2) Send a packet of information (by snail mail) to every NOAA field office explaining the worklife center and their services that are available. This information can be posted on the Diversity Bulletin Board in each office. Also send the information electronically to every person in NOAA. (3) Once a quarter send out a message on a unique service that NOAA employees can receive from the worklife center. (4) Do not send out an email to everyone in the field about a program that is being offered at the worklife center. There is nothing more discouraging than getting a message about a meeting at the worklife center that you are welcomed to attend when you live and work across the county. The field offices, at least the one I work in, see that message and fell very left out. It makes the field office think that people who live and work in DC have an advantage over those in the field. The message is good to send out when the session is telecasted on the internet, then stored for later viewing. That way people who are far away can also view the meeting. Plus shift workers can view the meeting at their own convenience. These are some ideas that I had on getting field offices in the worklife center. I hope this helps."*

*"In Asheville, we have a fitness center run by a contractor, so I think that quality of work life issues could easily be addressed in that setting."*

*"To expand that concept to a NOAA-wide service there would probably have to be increased support on the facility and supervisory levels, with adequate training and resource allocation.*  
**- Facility.** *Almost all NOAA field locations have a facility and a facility manager. For most of these (including the 3 NOAA ships I was on), the lunch room may be the closest thing they have to an R&R point. Some of these locations (including all 3 of the ships) may also have designated exercise areas, or hidey-holes where people can go for quiet study/training, or some way of just getting a breath of fresh air. Even the most remote of field offices (and I've been in 'em) have some type of exercise facility within a 10-15 minute jaunt.*

*It may be possible to tag the responsibility for finding such sites and/or establishing such joint-use relationships on the facility managers. This assumes that we as an agency can impress upon our facility managers that the human being is an important part of the overall facility health.*

*Most of the NWS offices I've worked in have been designed with more attention paid to the quality of life of the computer/electronic equipment than the people who work with it. For instance, we have temperature and humidity controls (with full backup equipment) to maintain near-constant climate conditions in our main computer processor room. We don't have that same climate control for our operations or office areas.*

**- Supervisors.** *To actually make use of such amenities we have to have a supervisory support structure that actually encourages people to use these things...and doesn't beat up on people who use them. In offices that currently have flextime it would seem rather easy to include such a time allowance. However, I've noticed that the current bean-counter approach to time-and-attendance accounting tends to discourage any true flexible work time. I find I have actually less signing-in/out and paperwork scrutiny if I don't use flextime but just use leave slips for this kind of stuff now. There is a real paranoia around about all the potential abuse of flexible work schedules. When I was in the Air Force, it was considered part of my job to stay in shape. I was allowed and encouraged to take a longer lunch break if it included exercise time (up to an hour a day, three days a week). I was usually in the office from 7am to around 530pm anyway...so I needed the break badly. I still do this same type of work in the NWS...and still need the break time, but don't get it.*

**- Materials/Training.** *To get the best bang-for-the-buck on training materials and impact we would really need to hit the managers/supervisors at their centralized workshop venues ...and have it flow out from there. If managers don't see their bosses and peers actively supporting this stuff, chances are they won't support it much in their offices. If such training is provided as an optional attendance session at a regional workshop, chances are most of the managers will opt out and go golfing instead...to improve their quality of life.*

**- Resources.** *There are probably many good managers and workgroups that have figured out how to do some of this without any outside assistance and for peanuts in cost. That's also probably the best way to do this. There's nothing more discouraging than to build a temple to some personal interest and have no one interested in attending. We should really focus on figuring out how to get our corporate culture to support ground-swell type efforts, better. And we need to consistently build on the idea that our employees are our greatest resource. Our NOAA Admiral and NWS General should understand this fairly well...but lots of our mid-level and/or regional managers are just not with this. Really good field managers do this already, but less-good managers have little incentive or ability to make these changes. The bottom line is dollars, the human quotient is rarely figured into the budget equation. The SFA process is pretty darned slow to turn the ship."*

*"I believe that the idea of having agreements with local fitness centers is a great idea... It seems that, in areas where there are numerous federal employees, there are either on-site facilities or agreements. It is in smaller locations, such as my own in western Nebraska, that such conveniences are missing. I believe that the negotiation might be able to be handled by the local offices; but, unless there is only one local office, it should probably be handled by GSA or whatever agency handles such things. The Union Pacific Railroad here has some kind of agreements with local health centers. I believe that they are actual contracts for services, not merely negotiated discounts. I don't know if the company has anything for day care. I don't think*

*they do. Twenty-four hour day care for children and/or elders is another area in which smaller locations are lacking. That certainly fits in with the worklife quality issues.”*

*“I have an idea although I don't know if this sort of program exists. How about creating a career center for NOAA employees? This could be geared more toward the NOAA employee who works in a line office but would like to transition him/herself into another area under NOAA. Or for the employee who would like to explore other options using their degree under NOAA.”*

*“One of the things I have noticed is a consistent lack of such work/life 'advantages' in field offices as opposed to NOAA HQ. Having spent time working in both field and HQ locations, it is hard to ignore the disparity between work/life facilities. For example, the silver spring complex has the on-site day care, cafeteria plus numerous restaurants within walking distance, in addition to the on site gym. In addition the HQ staff has access to onsite physicians/nurses for screenings etc. The HQ folks also can attain vouchers to offset cost of public transportation. Most, if not all of these are not available to the field offices. Not sure what can be done with this though, as the on site day care, cafeteria, gym, and screening/care services would likely not be feasible in most locations. As you mentioned you are working on the gym partnerships, I would imagine if some field sites were to receive these types of work/life enhancements, and not all, that could foster some resentment. I was a little blown away when I arrived at HQ and saw that just because I worked in Silver Spring, there were a lot of extra work/life perks, considering that I worked steady days, monday through friday there. Yet, when I worked weekends/nights and rotating shift in the field I had access to none of that. Although I think most of us in the field recognize the disparity, I imagine most realize that these things would not be economically feasible.”*

*“Since I work in one of the line offices (NWS) and have had experience in helping new employees in the NWS as well as my own personal experiences, I might be able to offer some ideas on how to help create some sort of career center. While I know that funding will be an issue with this type of program, I really think this could be beneficial to a lot of NOAA employees. So let's hope this could be feasible in the future.”*

*“Another option would be the use of vouchers to be applied to membership in fitness clubs by personal choice.”*

One idea received was to model the type of information found on the NOAA Fisheries web site on the Employee Worklife web site. Some of the information that is geared to all NOAA employees could be links to the following:

## **NOAA Employee Orientation**

### **General NOAA Information**

***Welcome Letter*** - A letter to new employees welcoming them to the NOAA

***Checklist for New Employees*** - A checklist and questionnaire used to assist new employees

***Employee Standards of Conduct*** - Links to important information regarding employee ethics and standards of conduct.

***NOAA Mission***

***NOAA Strategic Plan and Mission Statement*** - A Message from NOAA Leadership.

***Where is NOAA*** - NOAA headquarters is located in Silver Spring, Maryland,

## **Employee Resources**

***Employee Express*** - Using this web site connection, Federal employees (of participating agencies) will be able to make certain changes to their personnel-payroll information.

***Employee Personal Page*** - Is a personalized web site available for employees of agencies serviced by the National Finance Center (NFC). Using a web browser, employees can now view their payroll, leave, travel, insurance, savings bond, and other personal information online. Sign up today to start enjoying the benefits of self-service.

***Department of Commerce Leave Handbook*** - Guidelines for the use of leave.

***Access NOAA*** - Online newsletter for and by NOAA employees.

***NOAA Employee Worklife Center*** - NOAA's Employee Worklife Center offers free services to assist NOAA employees deal with their worklife issues.

***Transportation Subsidy Information*** - List of points of contact for information concerning NOAA's Transportation Subsidy.

***Thrift Savings Plan*** - The TSP is a retirement savings plan for employees of the U.S. Federal Government.

***The Department of Commerce Federal Credit Union*** - Through this web site you will be able to apply for a loan or a certificate, sign up for new services, and easily manage your personal finances.